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THE HOUSE

HOME DECORATION AND FURNITURE.

VII.



LET me say, in resuming these talks on interior decoration, that I do not intend to give many definite directions nor exact recipes, as it were, for ornamenting certain rooms. Even the sketches accompanying these papers, while they can always be followed exactly, are intended to be used more as suggestions than to be copied line for line. I hope, however, to be able to indicate in this way what I conceive to be various methods of treating rooms, their walls, ceilings, furniture and what not, in accordance with good taste.

Good taste is an extremely relative term. It is something like the direction of the old physician—Dr. Abernethy probably—who told his patient, "Follow the laws of health and don't be a fool." The laws of good taste, like the laws of health, are not apparent at a glance. Strange to say, it is generally assumed that every one who has a certain position in the community possesses the faculty of selecting good designs from bad, harmonious from inharmonious combinations of colors. No greater insult can be offered to a lady than to question her taste. No matter if she has had no special training, and is not familiar with the art of designing, it is understood that intuitive good taste is hers. Then, when we consider that what is in favor to-day is hopelessly out to-morrow, and that fashion rules the arrangement of our houses as relentlessly as the style of our clothing, we are naturally somewhat puzzled to know what is to guide us.

It seems to me that the only safe criterion is based on the knowledge of the best art work of the world. One who has studied the various styles of ornament intelligently has a right to expect that his opinion would carry more weight than that of a novice. I have never found anything so ugly but that some one liked it. The most hideous carpets, the most fantastic and tortured furniture, have their admirers. This misguided admira-

tion, however, does not last, and it is just here that one's knowledge of the subject is of use. At present everything old or "antique" is in vogue and much sought after. Now, every age has produced good examples of art and poor examples, and no better test can be devised for our good taste than to try to select the choicest pieces of old furniture, pottery or decoration. It takes much study and knowledge before one can justify his likes and dislikes, and give an intelligent reason for a design.

On the other hand, reasons and theories alone are apt to mislead one. I can follow Eastlake to-day in his reasoning. His logic was good, but the decorative and structural forms that he evolved seemed to embody only the good and the true, and to ignore the beautiful. It is useless to try to argue away our love of the beautiful.

We all like graceful and pretty forms and brilliant colors, and it is as natural to love bright colors in our decoration as to admire the hues of the butterflies and flowers. The practical difficulties that we encounter in trying to translate natural forms and colors into decora-

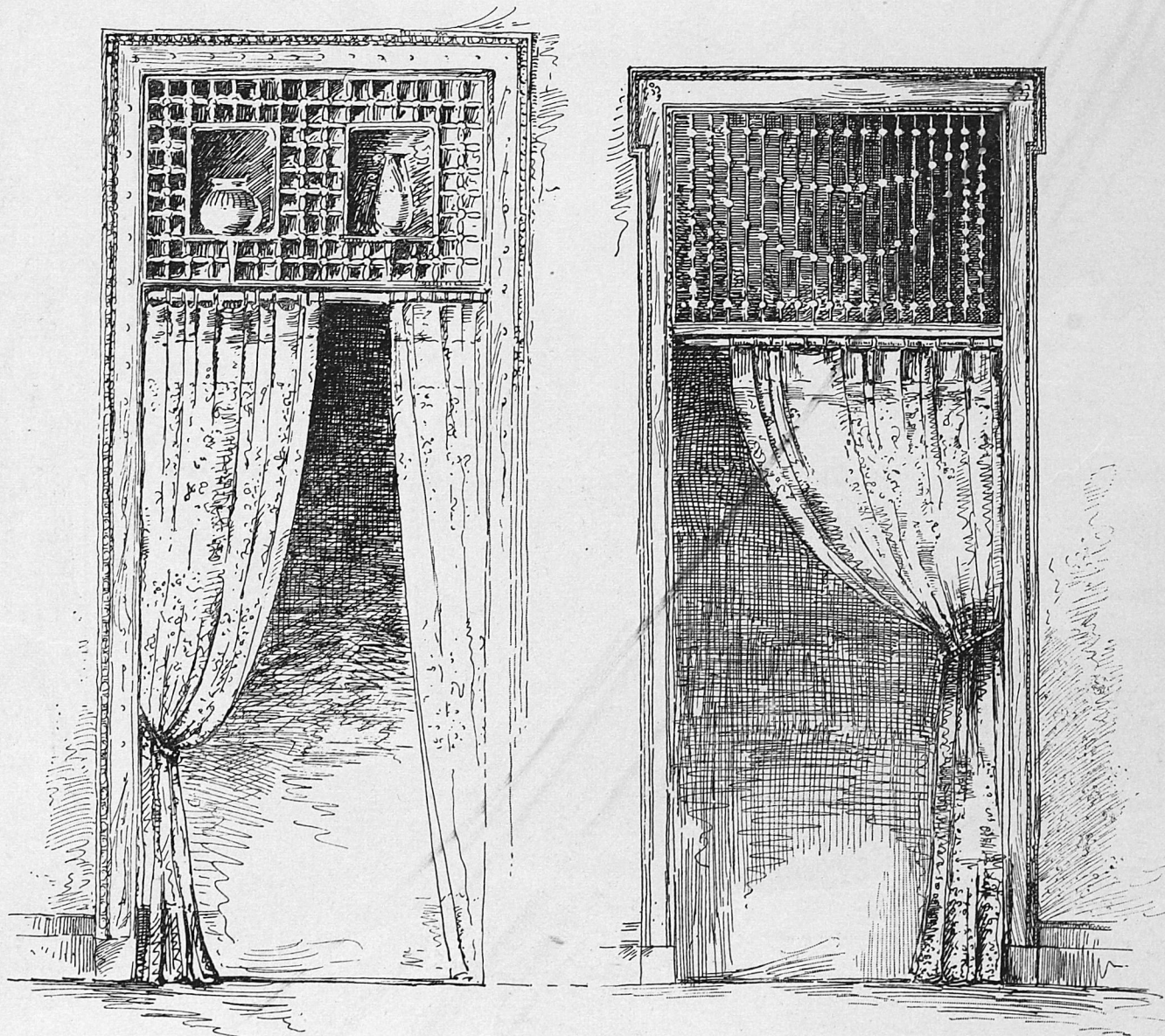
tion, however, does not last, and it is just here that one's knowledge of the subject is of use. At present everything old or "antique" is in vogue and much sought after. Now, every age has produced good examples of art and poor examples, and no better test can be devised for our good taste than to try to select the choicest pieces of old furniture, pottery or decoration. It takes much study and knowledge before one can justify his likes and dislikes, and give an intelligent reason for a design.

Each wood has its special grain and texture. We may by transparent stains soften the color without changing the characteristics of the wood. Oak, ash or cherry, for example, may be stained so as to give the appearance of age; but to make pine masquerade as oak or walnut by graining is telling a falsehood in paint; an unnecessary one, too, for pine properly treated is a handsome wood.

Insisting on the bare truth may be carried too far, as it sometimes is by purists, who theorize but do not produce. It is claimed that gilding and bronzing plaster friezes or other ornamental work is a deception, but I cannot agree to this. No one believes—or no one who knows anything about decoration believes—that the ornaments in question are of solid gold or bronze. Gilding has been used in this manner for centuries, and no such deception is practised as, for instance, when stucco is painted and lined off in imitation of stone. The general rule to be followed is to treat every material in the

most natural and common-sense way that will display its characteristics.

In the spindle transoms shown in my sketches an ordinary treatment of wood is used. The separate parts of the designs are only turned bits of wood, such as any turner can make at small expense. It will be seen that combinations of these forms are endless. In most of our city houses the door openings are too high, and need to be cut down in some such way. This gives a pretty effect, and at the same time makes the portière more manageable. The spindle-work being open is at times an advantage for ventilation; but if a draught follows, it may be stopped by covering one side of the transom with a piece of stuff that harmonizes in color with the portière. If the door is seen



TREATMENT OF TRANSOMS OF DOORS IN SPINDLE-WORK. BY A. W. BRUNNER.

tive elements are great and discouraging. The brilliant color of a flower often looks merely vulgar when we imitate it on plaster or wood. Then the effect of sunlight must be remembered as compared with the diffused light of a room, and the texture of the materials and many other considerations.

I must insist, of course, that all imitations are wrong; whether moral wrongs or not my readers must decide; but undoubtedly they are artistic sins. Besides such imitations are stupid. Every material has its decorative uses, and can best be utilized in its own way by bringing out its special peculiarities and emphasizing them, not

equally on both sides, a sheet of glass may be used so as not to mar the effect of the spindles.

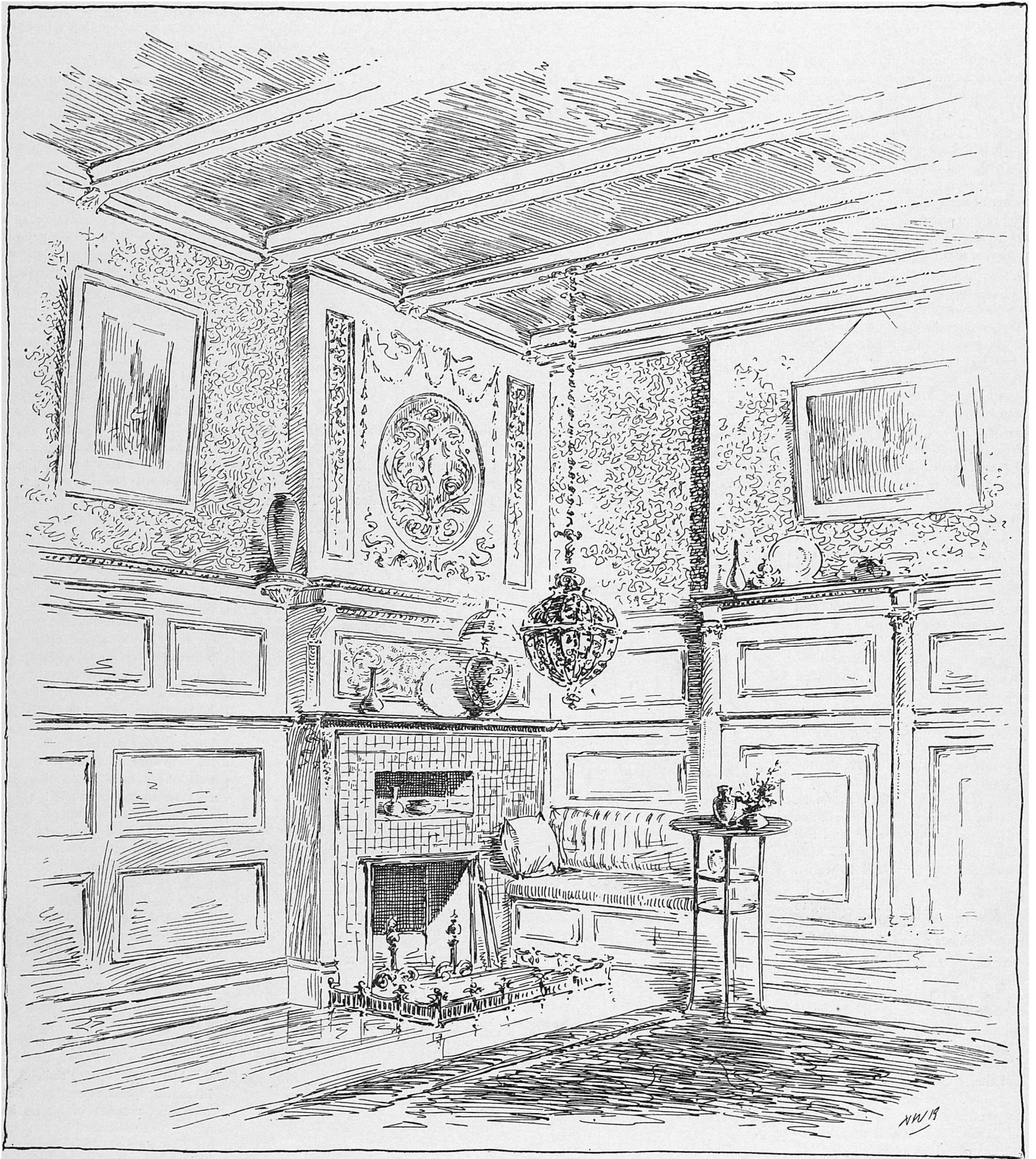
Leaded glass is an excellent substitute, and I have used it even where there has been an equal amount of light on both sides of the door. In this case there must be almost no color in the glass, but the pattern picked out in rippled or possibly opalescent glass, with flat cathedral glass for a background; or the entire pattern may be made by the lead lines, and the glass be transparent and colorless. This is a good ground for the rippled glass or for the use of bulls' eyes or sparkling bits placed on it. Almost any geometric pattern will do.

The curtains under the transoms had better hang straight from brass poles, or at most be simply looped to one side. Heavily draped curtains may look very artistic, but, in the first place, they must be very well done not to look hideous. Then the method of looping them over the top of a window or door takes away the light just where it enters; and another—a housekeeper's reason—they collect the dust. There is a custom now

plaster or papier-maché. The amateur modeller in clay can turn his modelling to use in this manner. Any decorative device of scrolls, ribbons, garlands, flowers that will fill the space, may be cast in plaster for the clay model, and put in place in the wooden frame.

Panels of this sort may be used in wainscots and, in fact, wherever a decorated panel is desired. There is a certain pleasure in having a piece of our own handi-

oil or water-color and flashing the highest points with bronze. This is the easiest way to obtain a good effect; but any scheme of color harmonizing with the surroundings can be carried out. The natural white of the plaster is always too staring, and at least an ivory tint must be obtained. This comes by merely letting the cast absorb as much linseed-oil as it will; then rubbing a very little yellowish brown in the crevices or corners of



TREATMENT OF A LIBRARY, WITH OVERMANTEL DECORATION IN IVORIZED PLASTER. BY A. W. BRUNNER.

to stretch delicate silk sash-curtains, to fasten them top and bottom on the windows, and this secures the light effect that these India silks produce when hanging free. Metal cornices are happily a thing of the past, and the brass pole, with rings, are good substitutes—cheaper, more artistic, better in every respect.

In the large drawing shown here, I would call attention to the decoration over the mantel-piece. This may, of course, be carved in wood, but it may also be of

work used in this way, and modelling in clay is a fascinating occupation. The delight of feeling the design growing under your hands is great, and casting the model in plaster is not difficult. Papier-maché is more trouble to make, but has the advantage of being light and it can be nailed to wood.

Such panels should emphatically not be painted to imitate the surrounding wood-work. They are susceptible of pretty decoration by simply tinting this in either

the design, and afterward slightly polishing the entire cast. A cast treated in this way—to look like old ivory—is well framed in wood-work painted white, with the mouldings touched with gold. ARCHITECT.

It is gratifying to notice a marked improvement in the style of table lamps, both as to color and design. For the bodies not only are Japanese vases in "solid color" used, such as we have long been accustomed to see,

but also the smaller, long, slender-necked vases. These are suitably mounted, with color in the shades to harmonize, and are both graceful and decorative, although they seem rather too small for a fair-sized room.

THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE EXHIBITION.

FIRST NOTICE.

THE Architectural League of New York is an association of architects and persons interested in architecture, which in the brief space of its existence has accomplished a great deal of good, and which is sure to make itself powerfully felt in determining the future of architecture in this country. It has gone on quietly for some years, holding its monthly meetings, at which many interesting papers by prominent architects have been read and discussed. Last year the League held its first separate exhibition, which met with gratifying success. It was a surprise to the public, which had been accustomed to seeing a few mechanical-looking plans and elevations stuffed away in a corner at the exhibitions of the Water-color Society, to see that our younger architects were capable of showing forth their ideas for new buildings in perspective, of making picturesque sketches of out-of-the-way European monuments and buildings, and, above all, of giving a hearty welcome to the sister arts, formerly classed as merely subordinate, of decorative sculpture and painting. This year they hold a still more important exhibition, beginning December 24th, at the Fifth Avenue Art Galleries. It includes a fine loan collection of decorative works contributed by private owners like Mr. Marquand, by manufacturing firms and importers like Allard & Co., Herter Bros. and Marcotte & Co., and by artists like Mr. La Farge, Mrs. Wheeler and Mrs. Lamb. We will return, in a second notice, to this interesting feature. At present we will confine ourselves to the section of drawings and designs.

Even this includes a great variety of work. There are architectural designs in perspective, elevations, working drawings, photographs of finished work, paintings in oil and water-color of architectural subjects, sketches of interior decoration and furniture, designs and cartoons for stained glass, mosaics, decorative stuffs, metal work and wood-carving. The plates which, by courtesy of the catalogue committee, we are enabled to use in this number will give some idea of the beauty of many of these designs. A strong tendency, much to be commended, is shown in the department of interior design, to develop the simple and appropriate Colonial style. "The Hall," designed by Mr. Frank E. Wallis, is one of the noblest designs in this style. Its spacious appearance and fine proportions can be better judged of from our illustration than described in words. The "Sitting-Room Chimney-breast," by Mr. Charles T. Mott, though belonging to an earlier and more elaborate form of the Renaissance, shows a similar command of the true elements of architectural beauty, proportion and balance. The relations of plain to richly wrought surfaces are exquisitely felt in both designs. Many of the designs in this department are necessarily of exteriors; but most of these are perspective designs in color, done for clients, and therefore readily understood by the lay public. We give as a specimen the pretty country house designed by Mr. George Martin Huss, which may be accepted as a type of its class. Other important drawings of this sort are the sketches for the Yale Memorial Library, by Mr. Bruce Price, and the competition drawings for the New York Athletic Club. In the same class we would mention the architectural sketches from England and Holland lent by the Century Company.

Our decorative painters and sculptors are largely represented. We can but give a general mention at this writing of the many large and important cartoons and drawings for all sorts of interior decoration by artists like J. Carroll Beckwith, T. W. Dewing, J. Augustus St. Gaudens, Mr. Kemys, Siddons Mowbray, George May-

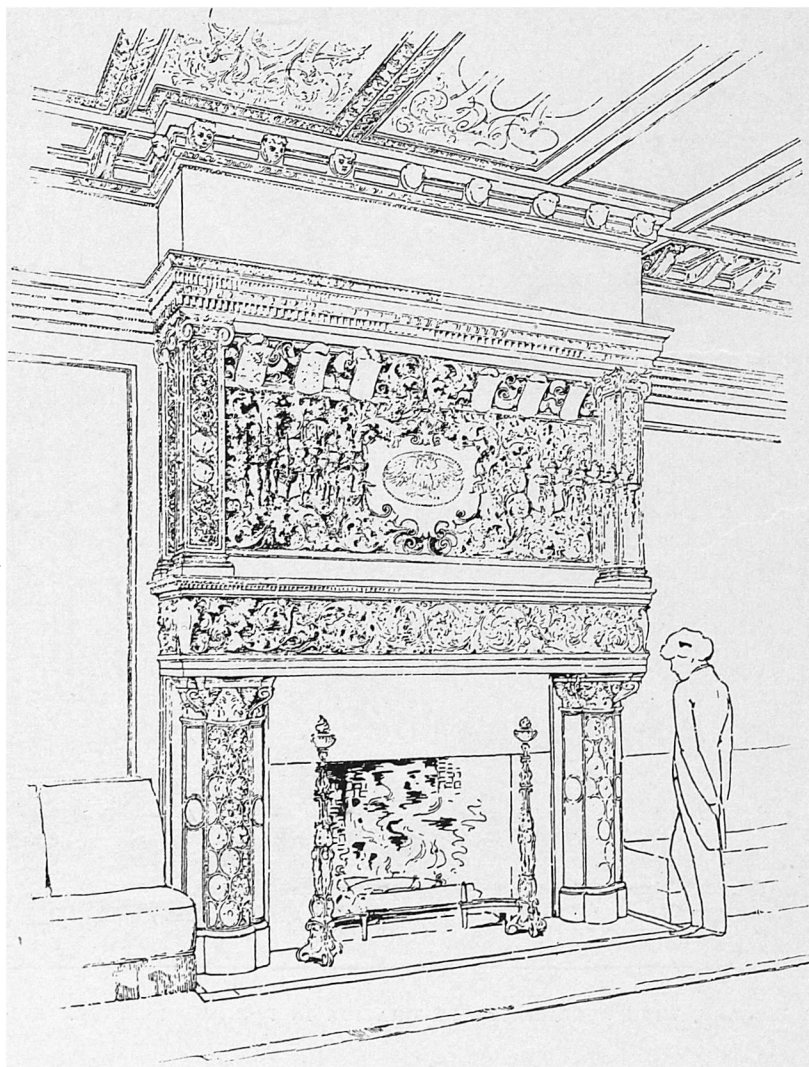
nard, F. S. Church, Frank Fowler, and those already referred to. Mrs. Ella Condit Lamb's fine panel of a kneeling angel, which we illustrate on another page, has a singularly timely appearance.

A word must be said for the catalogue from which these illustrations are drawn. The committee having it



SEAL OF THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE OF NEW YORK.

in charge, Mr. A. W. Brunner chairman, have succeeded in making it a model of its kind. Its forty illustrations are well printed on fine paper, and the work of classification, difficult as it has been, has been so well performed as to make it easy to refer to any particular



DRAWING-ROOM MANTEL. DESIGNED BY MR. CHAS. T. MOTT.

exhibit. The striking design by Mr. Blashfield for the seal of the League, which is used on the cover, and which we copy at the head of this article, is to serve also for the medals, gold, silver and bronze, which the League proposes to give for the best drawings sent in for its yearly competitions. This year the subject of

the competition is "The Tomb of a Great Architect." Let us hope that, though it may not be long before some of the members of the League shall deserve such a tomb, they may, in this respect, be kept as long as possible waiting for their deserts. ROGER RIORDAN.

THE USE OF CHARRED WOOD IN INTERIOR DECORATION.

THE art of burning or branding wood with hot irons is of considerable antiquity. It offers a wide field for amateurs, as a considerable range of effects is obtainable, from daintily outlined pictures no bigger than a Christmas card to Gothic traceries in high relief and with background burned to a jet black. Its applications are also extremely varied. Book covers, cabinets, articles of household and personal use may be so ornamented; and bolder designs may be applied to ceilings, friezes, panels, screens and, indeed, to all interior woodwork. It may even be utilized on the exterior of a house, when the situation is not too exposed. The capitals of wooden pillars, the beams and cornices of porch or portico may readily be decorated with Greek or Byzantine designs, executed with hot irons. Any requisite degree of relief may be attained, and, even without high relief, strong effects are possible because of the vigorous black of the carbonized wood.

Other materials beside wood may be made use of. In Germany much good work is at present being done on leather in the same manner and with the same tools that are used in charring wood. Many beautiful and peculiar effects may be got in charred plush. Bone or ivory may be so ornamented in the most delicate fashion; and, in short, any organic substance of even and firm texture may be decorated with hot irons.

Knowing the importance of the art and the probability of its growing in public favor, a representative of The Art Amateur called on Mr. J. W. Fosdick at his studio in Fifty-fifth Street, to learn from him some details about its latest applications, Mr. Fosdick, who is a pupil of the Paris École des Beaux Arts, having taken up the art with the determination to push it to its highest point. The studio is hung with charcoal studies of interiors, most of them done in the course of a sketching trip through Normandy, and with charred wood panels framed in various ways. Among the latter are illustrations of Longfellow and Tennyson, a memorial panel of a boy's head on white wood in an old Renaissance frame, several copies after Luca della Robbia, and a set of Gothic wall panels, with figures representing Art, Science, Literature and Music. Four large panels for use as a folding screen illustrate the "Legend of Sleepy Hollow." The figures are outlined with much spirit, and a few light tints burned in with a flat-iron give sufficient relief without detracting from the decorative appearance which was aimed at. Two much smaller panels by another artist, Mr. Ball Hughes, show how far the work may be carried pictorially. These have all the appearance of a somewhat hastily executed etching; but, though interesting as showing the possibilities of the work in this direction, they do not impress one in anything like the same degree as the larger and bolder work of Mr. Fosdick.

In answer to some questions, the latter gave a short account of his methods of work. "The tools used by me," he said, "are very simple. In Germany, where much delicate charred work is made use of in combination with fine marquetry, an instrument supplied with an alcohol lamp to keep the point hot is employed. Sometimes also a platinum point, kept heated by an electric current, is used for fine outline work. But the work commonly so

done can hardly be considered artistic, and I never make use of any of these instruments. A few irons shaped like common soldering irons, but brought to a pretty fine point, and one or two small flat-irons for the tints, are all the tools that are really needed. A small charcoal furnace should be added, for heating them. As

an iron will not keep hot enough for use longer than half a minute, two of the same sort must be in use together, one being plunged in the red charcoal as the other is taken out to continue the work. This constant shifting of the tool of course precludes the possibility of doing absolutely free-hand work. The design must be completely wrought out, first on paper; then be carefully transferred to the panel; and, in my own practice, I never alter a line once traced on the wood. White wood or basswood is that most commonly used. It is soft, chars readily, has an uniform fibre free from gums and resins, and its texture and color are very agreeable, approaching those of ivory. Pines and other resinous woods must be avoided, for they work irregularly, and, while charred wood fibre is absolutely permanent, the same cannot be said of imperfectly charred resins.

"One great advantage of the art is the facility of securing gradations. They are, in fact, unavoidable, as the iron is rapidly cooling from the moment it is taken out of the fire. I begin then with the strongest blacks or most vigorous lines, and go on to the fainter and more delicate parts of my work. By varying the degree of pressure of the iron on the wood and the length of time it is brought to bear on one place, these gradations can be kept somewhat under control.

"Retouching is possible, and the work may be carried out with the aid of sulphuric acid and other stains, and may be modified at the last by means of colored varnishes; but I never use any of these means, as I believe that the simplest technique is the best, and that the results obtained by mixed methods are usually confused and lacking in vigor.

"For framing, I have made considerable use of different colored plushes. Plush itself chars readily, and the lighter colors of jute plush take rather large patterns very well. Stamped leather also goes very well with charred wood; and the darker and coarser grained woods, such as oak, make good frames for panels of basswood or white mahogany."

SHAMS AND "REVETEMENTS."

SOME score of years ago, when, under the influence of the Eastlake movement, a crusade was instituted against everything which was not what it seemed, it appeared for a time as though we were finally to be driven back to bare walls, bare floors and unupholstered furniture. The reaction against the excessive and inartistic use of veneers, of grained painting, stucco and carvings affixed with glue was carried to such an extreme as to become itself ridiculous. Wall papers, varnish, "realistic" or "pictorial" treatment of any sort of surface ornament were declared to be false art, and were to be banished forever from our houses. Now, perhaps, we are again swinging too much in the opposite direction. The taste of the day is for rich ornamentation in the greatest possible

variety. Architects and builders are constantly looking out for new materials, inventors are constantly devising new processes to take the place of older and more expensive ones and to allow of their giving richer decorations for less money than formerly. The tendency is to construct with cheap materials which cannot be brought to an artistic finish, and to cover these with machine-

vaults in laths and plaster or of putting up great Gothic chimney-breasts over fireplaces of modern dimensions, their clients may be excused for making use of wall papers ribbed to imitate costly textiles, for buying tiles stamped to look like mosaic and for giving in to other more or less obvious shams of the sort. The bare plaster of our walls and ceilings as it is left by the builder is unbearable.

It must be covered somehow, and, as we have said, the more costly sorts of "revetement" are beyond the reach of most people. Hangings of silk or tapestry or stamped leather, panellings of oak or mahogany, are for people of considerable wealth only. For a long time those of more moderate means have had nothing but wall papers of various sorts for this purpose; but of late manufacturers have begun to provide other materials at prices which enable them to compete with the dearer grades of wall paper. The cheap Japanese cotton fabrics may be mentioned as one of these; but they do not suit every room, and their wearing qualities are not all that might be desired. A still newer material, and one that promises very well, is the Spurr wood veneer. This comes in thin sheets of fine natural woods—oak, maple, cedar, mahogany and amaranth; it may be applied directly to any plastered surface, and, when held in place by solid mouldings, there seems to be no reason why it should not last as long as heavy panelling, when removed from danger of contact with persons and furniture. From samples which we have seen and photographs of interiors which have been submitted to us, we should say that it can be used with excellent effect on ceilings, friezes and the upper part of walls. It is claimed for these veneers that they will stand heat and moisture without cracking. They certainly offer a beautiful surface, either dead or polished.



HALL, IN COLONIAL STYLE. DESIGNED BY MR. FRANK E. WALLIS.

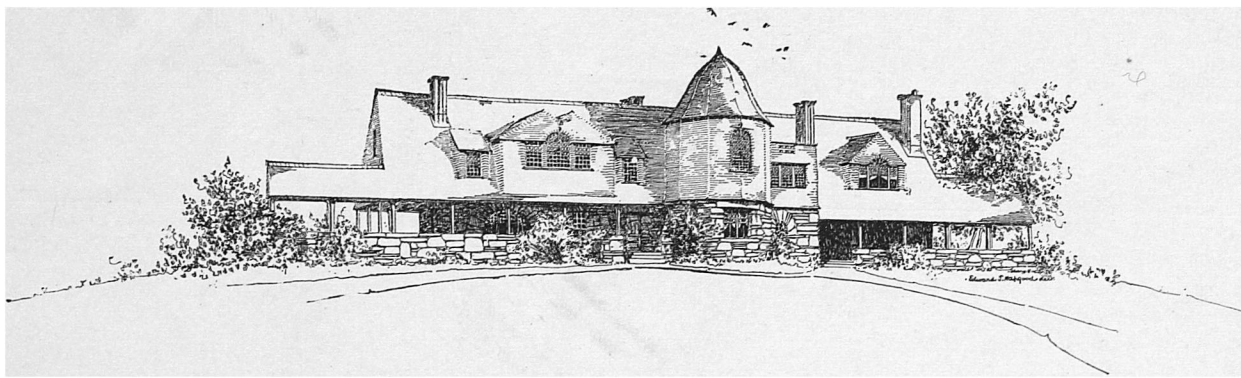
GOTHIC BANDS FOR WOOD-CARVING.

wrought decoration, or, what in reality is far worse, with mechanically designed and executed handwork.

It is a delicate matter to point out just where this tendency should be checked; for it is plain that very few can afford to use costly materials in solid construction, and still fewer can pay for elaborate artistic decoration.

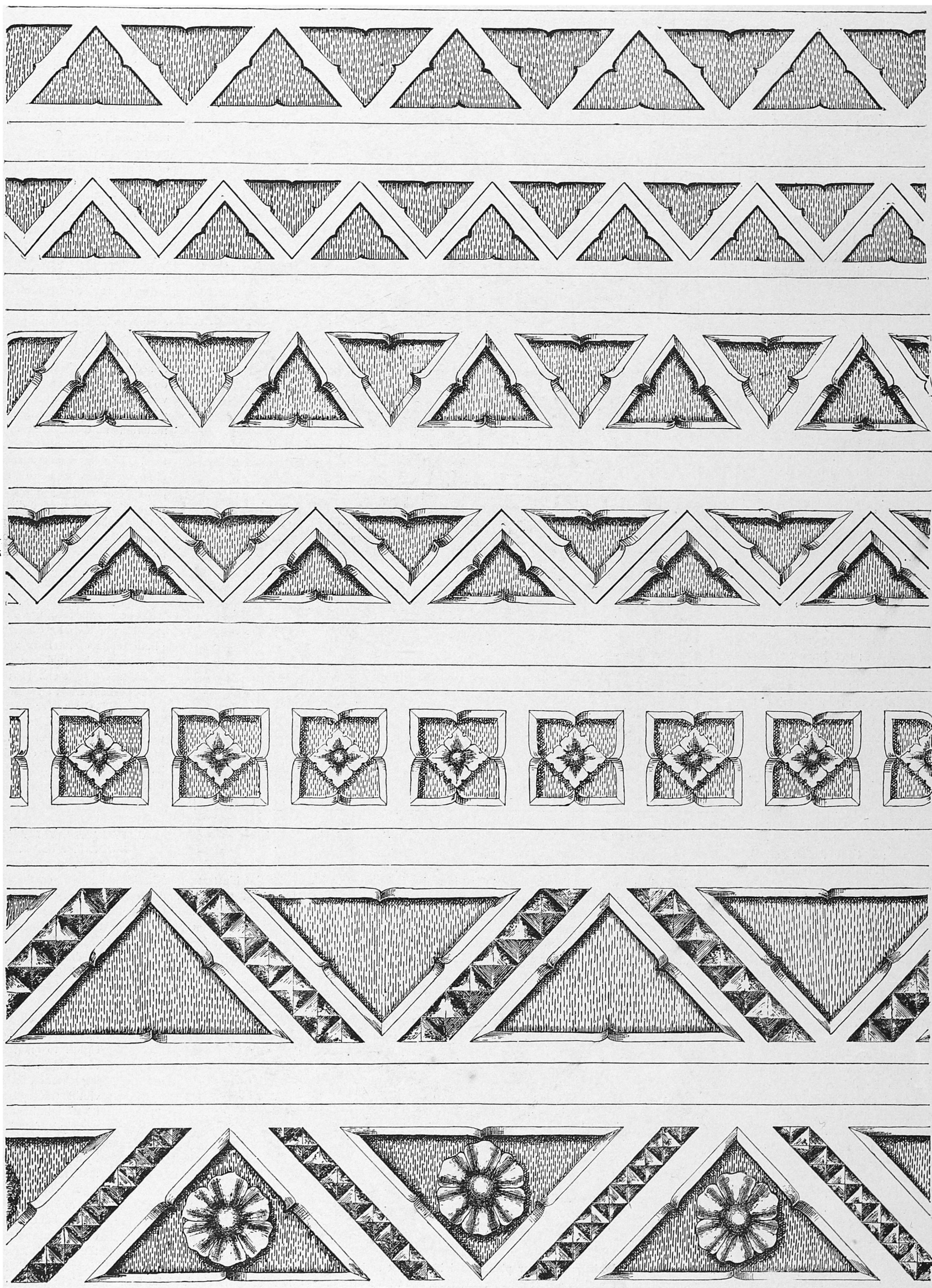
In the illustration of horizontal bands, on the page following, the first and second lines show examples of the simplest form of Gothic design, useful for surface carving of horizontal bands, as on the square or rounded edges of tables and shelves. Such surface work, to be effective, must, of course, be done on polished wood. The third and fourth lines show designs that should, when an inch wide, be lowered from one-eighth to one-fourth of an inch. A leading characteristic of Gothic tracery is that its straight bands are usually broken in the centre of their length by a projecting cusp, and are finished with a gouge cut or hollow on each edge, which stops about half way of the depth to which the design is lowered.

This is an essential feature of Gothic work which must not be overlooked. The fifth line might be used for either horizontal or vertical decoration; the sixth and seventh would show effectively in bands of from three to four inches in width, enriched as those are with rows of the characteristic dogtooth. BENN PITMAN.



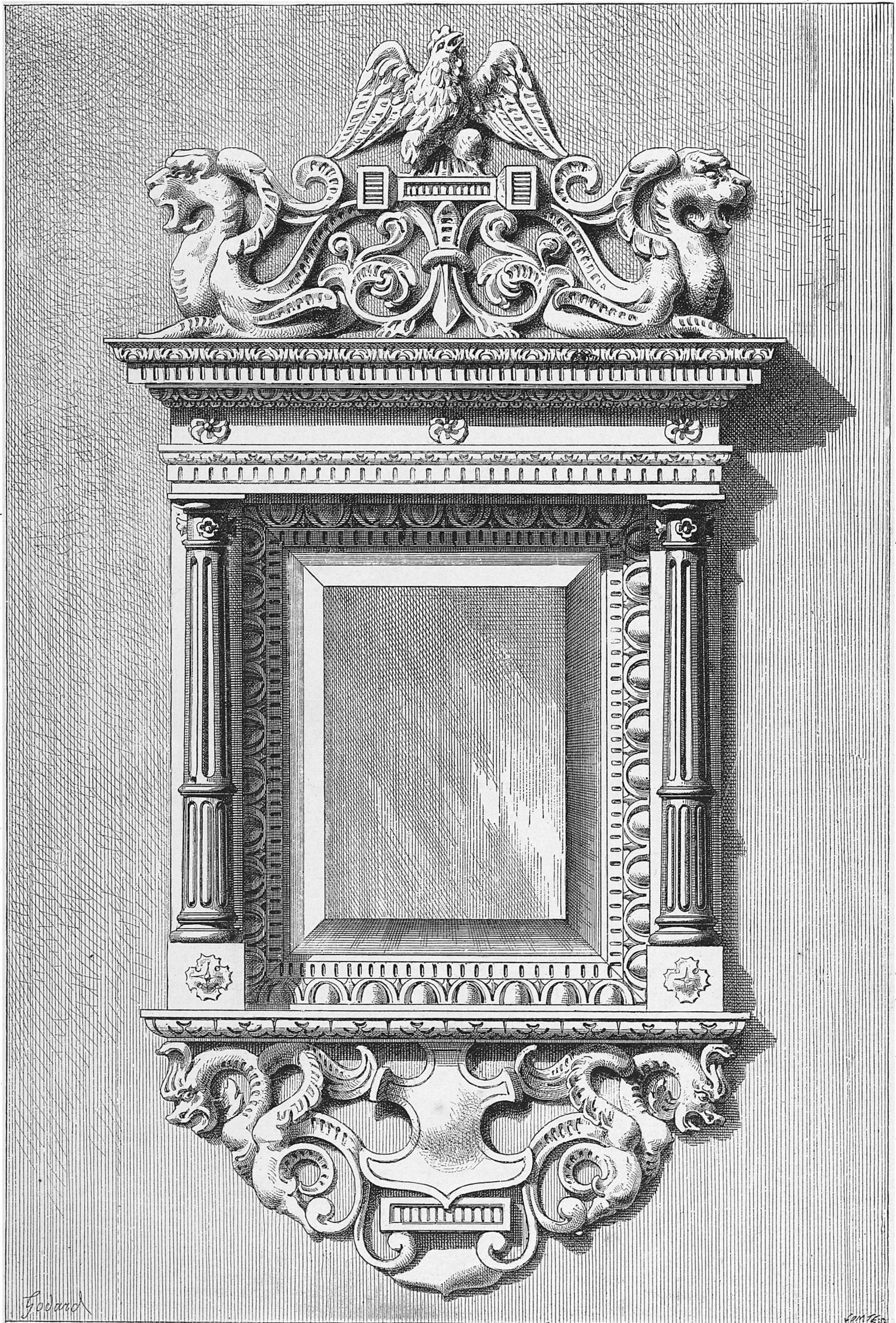
COUNTRY HOUSE. DESIGNED BY MR. GEORGE MARTIN HUSS.

Perhaps the wiser plan would be to rest satisfied with the plain aspect of plain materials, and with a little ornament of the best quality; but this might be called the heroism of æsthetic taste, and it is not to be expected from the majority. At any rate, if our architects are not to be asked to forego the pleasure of copying stone



GOTHIC BANDS FOR WOOD-CARVING. BY BENN PITMAN.

THE FIRST TWO EXAMPLES ARE FOR SURFACE WORK; THE OTHERS ARE FOR DEEPER CUTTING. SEE PRECEDING PAGE.



ITALIAN CARVED MIRROR. SIXTEENTH CENTURY.